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THE  
REAL QUESTION AT ISSUE,  
&c.



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THE  
REAL QUESTION AT ISSUE  
BETWEEN THE  
OPPONENTS AND THE SUPPORTERS  
OF A BILL

55.

NOW BEFORE THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

AND ENTITLED,

*"A BILL TO REMOVE CERTAIN DISABILITIES  
WHICH PREVENT SOME CLASSES OF HIS MAJESTY'S SUBJECTS  
FROM RESORTING TO THE UNIVERSITIES OF ENGLAND,  
AND PROCEEDING TO DEGREES THEREIN."*

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BY THE

REV. WILLIAM DALBY, M.A.

VICAR OF WARMINSTER, WILTS,  
AND FORMERLY FELLOW AND TUTOR OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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*Injurioso ne pede proruas  
Stantem columnam.*

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1834.

447.



THE  
REAL QUESTION AT ISSUE,

&c.

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I WRITE, without any pretension to importance or to ability, but with a clear view, and an honest love of a righteous cause, to assist in exposing a fallacy, and in averting an act of oppression; for it is a fallacy to represent, that as a *liberal* measure, and a measure of relief, which would be more justly characterized as an intrusive and pernicious one; and it would be oppression, even if legalized by Parliament (I speak hypothetically), to force men on the alternative, of acting as traitors to the trusts which they have accepted, or of abandoning those trusts to persons inimical to the purposes for which they were created.

I write—not only as a member of five and twenty years' standing, of one of the ancient Universities of this realm, experienced in her Institutions, gratefully sensible of their value, and willing (if need be) to suffer in defence of their integrity—but also as a British subject, jealous of rights and



principles which never yet were violated without peril to the throne and to the people ; I write—as a Churchman, who sees the surest, though perhaps the least suspected, train of mischief, laid for the demolition of all that man can demolish of the National Church ; I write—as a Christian, determined to protest against the attempted overthrow of one of the strongest and most sacred securities which exist for the national recognition of Christianity.

A Bill has been brought into the House of Commons for the purpose of compelling the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge (for they are confessedly the bodies aimed at, though not expressly specified) to receive, and to confer degrees (except in Divinity) upon “ all his Majesty’s subjects,” without requiring them “ to subscribe any Articles of religion, or to make any declaration of religious opinions respecting particular modes of faith and worship,” provided that they be otherwise qualified, as the framers of the Bill have thought it sufficient to direct.

Now, the claim to *admission* (or *matriculation*) which the Bill thus proposes to create, subverting the practice of one of those Universities, and making that of the other a matter of necessity, whereas it is at present voluntary and permissive, I do not intend to discuss, any farther than by protesting against all such infringement of their ancient, rightful, and salutary independence. Whatever I may feel and be persuaded of on that point, how strong

soever I may think the existing evidence *in one quarter* may be of the injurious effect of relaxing in that respect, I forbear to enlarge upon it; but I indicate below a publication which treats of it most ably, and on the soundest principles<sup>1</sup>.

It is against the forcible interference which is contemplated with the *grant of Degrees* by our Universities, that I mean to argue, as involving in it all minor wrongs, and precluding the application of a remedy to them. They are threatened with the deprivation of the liberty of adhering to a principle ever sacred among them (days of anarchy and usurpation alone excepted), a principle which they have for ages maintained as essential to their preservation, their usefulness, and their tranquillity. They are told, that they shall no longer require that the candidates for the Degrees which they confer, as the warrant of *their* complete approbation, and the passport to authority within *their* walls, and to situations of trust and influence without them, should be Christians of the established national Church.

In thus stating the case, I do not forget the all but nugatory exception in favour of "Degrees in Divinity." It may be well to dispose of it at once. I do so, then, by explaining that those De-

<sup>1</sup> Thoughts on the Admission of Dissenters to the University of Oxford, by the Rev. W. Sewell, M.A. Fellow and Tutor of Exeter College, Oxford. Oxford:—Talboys. London:—Rivington: Bohn.

degrees, though intended and regarded by the University as distinctions of peculiar moment, in the scale of its dignities, do not bring with them (save in the mere matter of precedence) any additional right or privilege beyond those which *must be previously acquired* by graduating in Arts. Now, the interference projected embraces the degrees in Arts, beside those in Law and Medicine.

I proceed to open the question, intending strictly to confine myself to that view of it which every true Christian will allow to be the first in due order, and the most important: but which is, at present, too successfully veiled under partial and imperfect representations of the scope and probable effect of the Bill proposed.

Let it first be asked (as there is good right and good reason to ask), on what ground do the promoters of this startling aggression on our academical freedom and discipline attempt to justify their aim? On this: that it is illiberal to persevere in a course which has the effect of excluding Dissenters from the attainment of Oxford and Cambridge degrees.

*The imputation is unjust, and the aspect which it gives to the question really at issue is a delusive one: it tends to hide from the minds of men nine-tenths of the consequences connected with it.*

*The imputation is unjust.* There is no illiberality in the exclusion complained of: there is only a straight-forward fidelity to the good and great purpose for which our Colleges were founded and our



Universities chartered, and which they cannot accomplish without the safeguard which it is thus intended to wrest from them.

*The aspect, which the imputation of illiberality toward Dissenters gives to the question really at issue is a delusive one.* For that question is, *not* whether a few Dissenters (as it is the fashion to talk) shall be allowed to partake of our academical distinctions, and to wear them as a feather in the cap, *but* whether religion, whether Christianity, shall keep, or lose its place in the framework of our academical institutions. This, I repeat, is THE REAL QUESTION AT ISSUE. I ask those who, at first sight, may deem this an overstrained assertion, only to suspend their judgment for the few minutes which the perusal of the following page or two will occupy. *I shall not travel beyond this first great stage of the argument.*

The end for which the Establishments which I am defending were founded, and have been fostered, was *the union of religion with learning; of learning with religion*. I can hardly suppose that *this* position will be denied, in the face of history and of fact. But if any are so bold: I set in array against their denial, the Charters of the Universities, the Statutes of Colleges, the Speeches from the Throne in reply to academical addresses, and the testimony, express or implied, of every published record of any authority, in which the con-

stitution and procedure of Oxford and of Cambridge are fairly and fully described.

But no : there will be little attempt made to dispute this averment ; none at all, perhaps, except by a chance cavil here and there. It will, for the most part, be admitted with the levity which is too prevalent, and too popular, that such certainly was the main purpose of our founders and benefactors, and that our convocations and our colleges, our heads and our tutors, from generation to generation, have acted in conformity to it, with a very innocent honesty, in all their regulations, and particularly in that which it is now proposed that Parliament should annul. But, it will be added, you should remember, that you must not insist too rigidly on the maintenance of those views of the old school, in the present more liberal and more enlightened days.

*Magnus ab integro sæclorum nascitur ordo.*

The grand principle, now, is to do away, as fast as possible, with all limitations and qualifications of a religious character. You must bear with its application to the Universities. You must allow us to rescue you from the imputation of bigotry under which you now lie. We are called upon to do so, upon grounds which our professed political creed obliges us to admit and enforce. There are, we are informed, many “ sincere and conscientious

men<sup>1</sup> who desire to obtain your degrees, for the sake, of course, of the various advantages belonging to them ; but who are so far from maintaining any such conformity to the faith of the Established Church as you have hitherto required your graduates to avow, that they object to its being made a condition with themselves, or with any for whom they apply, to give any account whatsoever of what they believe, or disbelieve. They want the certificates of approval which you bestow : but they have no mind to your religious tests. You must, therefore, let them have the one, without imposing on them the other. Do not, however, be afraid that we are going to intermeddle with your system of religious instruction, or with your privilege of granting appropriate distinctions to such as may voluntarily place themselves under it. We shall leave your degrees in divinity at your own disposal entirely<sup>2</sup>.

Such is the acknowledged spirit of the Bill. Such is the apparent (but only the apparent) extent of its provisions.

Now, Christian parents, and all who are or may be interested in the maintenance of Christianity as the directing principle and controlling sanction of education in our Universities, I invite you to give your serious attention to the simple and authentic statement which I am about to lay before you, with

<sup>1</sup> Preamble of the Bill.

<sup>2</sup> See page 7.

the intent of proving that the *operation* of the Bill would totally *overthrow that principle, and annul that sanction*. Dissenters of piety and of principle ! I am addressing myself to you no less than to my fellow churchmen. The respect which I entertain for you forbids me to suppose that you will attach less importance than I do to the facts which I shall allege, and to their bearing upon **THE REAL QUESTION AT ISSUE**. I write in a friendly spirit. With you, we defenders of the prominence due to religion in education, can surely have no quarrel. With your false brethren and our own, with political Dissenters and latitudinarian Churchmen, we have; and we will sustain it (with the help of God) to the last, in the same spirit in which your forefathers once seconded ours in resisting the meditated subversion of the best earthly bulwarks of our common Christianity, under the specious guise then, as now, of universal toleration. We bore the brunt of the battle, then : and we are ready to do so again. Be ye also ready. I proceed to show, that there is a cause for our sounding the alarm, and for your pondering on its reasonableness.

Let me premise, that I shall confine my citations to the statute-book of the University of *Oxford*. I do so, both to avoid prolixity, and to enable me to say, that I can bear personal and experienced testimony to the faithful agreement of the practical procedure of the officers of that body, with the plain and weighty language of the injunctions



which I shall quote. That the principles and practice of the sister University are, in regard to that grand point on which I am *exclusively* dwelling, substantially in unison with those which will be thus exhibited, I hold to be unquestionable, on all the acquaintance which I possess with her regulations, and the execution of them. But I shall limit myself strictly to the exposition of the things which I have seen and do know.

In Oxford, then, every member of a College who desires to obtain a degree, *must pass* his public examination. That ordeal is conducted by Graduates nominated by the highest acting authorities, and approved in an open assembly of all its governing members. Each, on his admission to office, takes the following oath<sup>1</sup>: "I swear, that I will execute the office and duty of a Public Examiner diligently and faithfully, to the utmost of my ability, after the form and in the manner required by the statutes."

What regard, then, do these statutes require him to pay to the attainments in *religious* knowledge of the Candidates who come before him? They speak as follows<sup>2</sup>:

"*Before all other matters, the RUDIMENTS OF RELIGION claim precedence. Let the Examiners remember, and let them consider this as the inviolable interpretation of their oath, that a failure on this*

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for the original.

<sup>2</sup> See as before.



*subject cannot be compensated by any other merits whatsoever in the Candidates: so that whosoever of them shall not have given satisfaction to the Examiners on this most important of all points, can have no Testimonium at all.*" [i. e. cannot be allowed to pass.]

This, then, as was due to the honour of God, and of our holy religion, is the reigning principle of our Public Examinations. THE QUESTION AT ISSUE is, whether it shall stand in force, or be utterly subverted? Christians, whether Churchmen or Dissenters, prepare to consider which of the two would you prefer.

I proceed to recite the particular directions which the statute gives for the procedure of the Examiners in this leading branch of their duty.

“Let the Holy Gospels in Greek be always made part of the subjects of examination. Let some passage in them be put before the Candidate, that he may construe it; and let the questions which arise out of it; thus construed, and also others, from the History both of the Old and of the New Testament, be pursued into detail.

“Let the Examination also embrace the Articles of Doctrine, which were put forth in the Synod of London, A. D. 1562; and in which, according to the Statutes of the University, Tutors are to instruct all who are committed to their care. Let there be short questions, and very plain ones, put concerning the Doctrines themselves. Then let

the Candidate be required to cite those passages of Holy Scripture, by which the Doctrine in question, in each case, is principally established.

“Moreover, the Evidences, (as they are termed) or Arguments on which the truth both of Natural and Revealed Religion rests, are to be considered as included within the scope of the Examination.”

I presume that I hardly need add a word to this extract, to justify my assertion that the Bill now before the House of Commons entirely and expressly frustrates the care which has thus been taken, to render a knowledge and conviction of Christianity, on the sound and sober views of our National Church, an indispensable pre-requisite to the attainment of our degrees.

For how could we, without exposing ourselves to derision, continue to say to our academical youth, we insist on your satisfying us that you have acquired an elementary proficiency in Scriptural truth, as held and maintained by the Church of England, if the Legislature is to interfere and tell them, “you shall have your Degree, whether you give the University any such satisfaction or not, provided that you can pass muster in other respects?” And what *other* interpretation or effect can possibly be assigned to an enactment, which not only prescribes that “it shall be lawful for all His Majesty’s subjects to receive and to enjoy all degrees of learning conferred in the Universities of England (degrees in divinity alone excepted),

without being required to subscribe any Articles of Religion, or to make any declaration of religious opinions respecting particular modes of faith and worship, provided such applicants be of unexceptionable moral character, and of competent knowledge, and willing to conform to such rules of discipline, as are or shall be established by the authorities of the several Colleges and Halls ;” but adds, beside, *this* gentle and considerate proviso, “ that no *Statute*, Law, Ordinance, Decree, or Grace, made or passed by any authority whatsoever, in any of the said Universities, or in any of the Colleges or Halls within the same, shall in any manner obstruct, limit, or qualify the plain intent and obvious meaning of the foregoing enactments ; but such *Statute*, Law, Ordinance, Decree, or Grace, shall be to all intents and purposes void and of no effect ?” Yes : so runs the menace. Thus imperiously and insultingly would the self-styled ‘liberal’ of the age, enter in and despoil our academical institutions of their peculiar glory, of their best title to the Divine protection, and to the gratitude of man, and then gag and bind us, lest we struggle to recover it.

Need I repeat that there is no other alternative than that which I have exposed ? If the measure now before the House of Commons pass into a law, the solemn provisions of our academical statute, just cited, are trampled into the dust. And yet, it is in those provisions, with their existing sanctions,

that is concentrated the purest spirit of that discipline which, under the blessing of the Almighty, works every year more effectually, though as mildly <sup>1</sup> as ever, to the restraint of irreligion, vice, and insubordination, and to the increase of piety, moral principle, and good order among the sons of Britain, who are committed to its governance <sup>2</sup>.

Will any persons harbour the idea that we need not discard Christianity from our examinations, even if we were placed under the shackles which are being forged for us,—arguing thus—that we might, at all events, continue to require the knowledge and proof of those Articles of Belief on which Dissenters are agreed with Churchmen? No: none who know the boundless extent of the differences of dissent from the Church, and from itself. None, who know that from the vital doctrine of the Atonement to the least important of subordinate inferences from Scripture, there is *not one* which is not combated by some sect, either against our views, or against those of some rival denomination. Well may the authors of a declaration to which I shall presently allude more particularly,

<sup>1</sup> “We mean nothing harsh, nor gloomy, by our enactments,” say the venerable Framers of our academical Statutes, “it is our wish to keep lenity in view throughout, only avoiding that kind of lenity which looks like designed encouragement to the indolence of youth.” See Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> See a Letter to the Right Hon. E. G. Stanley, appended to Two Sermons, &c. by W. Sewell, M.A. London. Bohn.

“protest against the notion that Religion can be taught on the vague principle of admitting persons of every creed.” The summary of such a religion must be—a blank. Besides, we could not go even so far (supposing it possible) under the proposed Bill. For among “His Majesty’s subjects” are sundry Jews, Bramins, and Mahometans, Deists, and Polytheists (for I will not say Atheists), all “sincere and conscientious men,” doubtless, in the sense in which these terms are applied in the Preamble. Some of *them*, too, would be glad to matriculate, and obtain our degrees, it is to be supposed ; and lest they be “excluded,” it is provided, that neither they, nor their fellow-subjects, shall be required “to make ANY declaration of religious opinions respecting particular modes of faith and worship.” Christianity, therefore, as a stumbling-block to them, if it remained in our examinations, must, to accommodate them, be struck out.

Senators of the British empire ! Will you make yourselves responsible for such an act as this ? We will not believe it. You (the majority of the day) were taken by surprise when you consented to its introduction, and now that you have had an interval for inspection and consideration of the impious and tyrannical project, you will (will you not) indignantly reject it.

That I speak not unadvisedly, when I call it *impious*, I believe myself to have proved. That I



am equally justified in designating it as *tyrannical*, will be allowed by all who have read and candidly weighed the declaration of the Members of the University of Oxford, "immediately connected with the instruction and discipline of the place<sup>1</sup>." Stating, first, that they believe that the proposed measure "would lead to the most disastrous consequences, that it would unsettle the minds of the younger members of the University; would raise up and continue a spirit of controversy, which is at present unknown; and would tend to reduce religion to an empty and unmeaning name, or to supplant it by scepticism and infidelity;" they go on to avow, that "they therefore deem it their bounden duty to Almighty God, and to those committed to their charge, to continue their present system of religious instruction; and they declare, that it is their determined purpose, to the utmost of their power, to maintain the same inviolate." Shall the consciences of these men be forced? Shall they be driven on "the alternative" (I now repeat my words) "of acting as traitors to the trusts which they have in express terms

<sup>1</sup> Signed by all but *four* out of *ninety-one*, which is the whole number: unopposed by any, unless *two* voices in a crowded Convocation, met to petition against the Bill, were voices of men connected with the studies of the place. I trust not. Cambridge has vindicated itself from misinterpretation, through the expression of similar sentiments by an overwhelming majority.

accepted, or of abandoning those trusts to persons inimical to the purposes for which they were created ?”

This is but one shape in which the real question at issue presents itself. Yet, surely even in that one shape it will be viewed, on constitutional no less than on religious grounds, with deep and anxious interest, by all who see how liberty of conscience may be invaded by those who profess the greatest regard for it : and how the sacred purpose of institutions of a thousand years’ date, may be struck at, with a deadly aim, under the plausible pretext of relief to “sincere and conscientious men.”

I, however, confine myself to the one grand point in respect to which, *as a Christian* (and a *Christian father*), I protest against the measure ; namely, its tendency to drive Christianity itself from the foreground which it occupies in the ancient Universities of our land. Other and far abler pens <sup>1</sup> (in publications to which I think it a duty to refer my readers) have added to a similar exposure of this its darkest feature, just censures of the other dangerous, delusive, and self-contradictory bearings of its enactments. They have deserved well of their country.

<sup>1</sup> See Sewell’s *Thoughts* (quoted before), also “The Attack upon the University of Oxford, in a Letter to Earl Grey.” Rivingtons. Moberly’s *Remarks on the proposed Admission of Dissenters into the University of Oxford*. Parker :—Oxford.

I conclude.

Pious Dissenters! would to God that our children and yours could proceed to academical degrees together, without the destruction of any important barrier of our common Christianity! But you see how the case stands. If we were to take down one battlement of our Church, *the enemy* would rush in *like a flood*. May *the Spirit of the Lord* shed grace, honour, and comfort, on all your peculiar seminaries, in which the truths of God are unshrinkingly upheld!

Political Dissenters, and ye who, unhappily for yourselves, are not Christians by conviction, whatever you may be by profession: we have protested, and do protest, against the chartering for the education of youth, a College, which confesses itself to be under the necessity of excluding religious instruction. We do so through no paltry jealousy: we have no apprehensions from its rivalry. We are influenced by jealousy for *the fear of God*, and *the honour of the King*. But, if it must be so, it is enough that we *have* protested. Only, let the turbid and bitter waves which alone can roll from such a source, have banks of their own, and a channel to themselves. Only, with the sweet and tranquil waters of our academic streams

Doris amara suam non intermisceat undam.

Fellow Churchmen, fellow Christians, fellow countrymen, we invite you to assist in making



known what is THE TRUE QUESTION AT ISSUE ; and in petitioning that right and truth may not be overborne by reckless precipitancy or hostile prepossession.

Let us tell our representatives, respectfully, but firmly, that it is our conviction, that they who propose to un-Church the Universities, mean to un-Christianize the nation.

We commit the cause to Him who judgeth righteously.

WARMINSTER VICARAGE,  
*May 5, 1834.*

## APPENDIX.

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### P. 13.

CORPUS STATUTORUM UNIVERSITATIS OXONIENSIS. Titulus, ix. Sectio ii. De Examinandis Graduum Candidatis, § 1.

Domine Doctor, *vel* Magister, *vel* Domine, tu jurabis, quod munus et officium Examinatoris Publici sedulo et fideliter pro virili exequêris, forma et modo per statuta requisitis. Resp. Juro.

### P. 13.

§ 3. Præ cæteris omnibus primum sibi locum vindicant Religionis Rudimenta. Meminerint Examinatores, et hanc sibi sanctam habeant juramenti sui interpretationem, defectum in hac re nullis aliis quibuscunque Candidatorum meritis compensari posse, ita ut qui in gravissima hac materie Examinatoribus non satisfecerit, nullum omnino testimonium obtineat.

### P. 14.

Adhibentor semper SS. Evangelia Græca, e quibus locus aliquis Candidato interpretandus proponatur, et quæstiones ex ista interpretatione oriundæ, necnon ex historia tam Veteris quam Novi Testamenti excutiantur. Adhibentor etiam Doctrinæ Articuli in Synodo Londini, anno 1562 editi; in quibus, juxta Academiæ Statuta, a Tutoribus instituendi sunt omnes qui illorum tutelæ

committuntur. De ipsis Dogmatibus breves sunt et dilucidæ quæstiones, deinde ad locos SS. Scripturæ provocetur, ex quibus Dogmati isti de quo agitur fides præcipue adstruenda sit. Porro et Evidentiæ quas vocant, sive argumenta quibus innititur Religionis tam Naturalis quam Revelatæ veritas, ab hac Examinatione nequaquam alienæ censendæ sunt.

Note, p. 17 (Note).

Nihil vero triste aut asperum molimur. Lenitati ubique consultum volumus, modo ne ea sit, quæ juniorum socordiae patrocinari videatur.

THE END.



